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SUBJECT: Detained Journalist Freed After Discreet Embassy
Inquiries

Ref: Maputo 394

Maputo 349

¶1. (SBU) The Mozambican police detained for several days journalist Celso Manguana of independent fax daily Canal de Mocambique, arguably the leading fax newspaper for investigative reporting. Manguana was arrested March 31 when he appeared at the police station where a dozen protestors had been detained in the wake of a demonstration outside the National Assembly earlier that day. The demonstrators had been demanding the government dismiss Minister of Defense Dai, as a way of taking responsibility for the tragic explosions at a weapons depot in a Maputo suburb on March 22 that killed more than 100 people and injured more than 500 (reftel A).

¶2. (SBU) Apparently, according to embassy sources, Manguana (who is known as particularly argumentative and outspoken in journalist circles) called the police "incompetent." For his trouble, he was charged with drunkenness (comment - Manguana may, in fact, have been tipsy, according to our sources. end comment) and hauled off to the central hospital for a breath test. The breathalyzer was not working, however, so a blood sample was taken instead and Manguana, on his way back to jail, was told that the results would be "ready in a week."

¶3. (SBU) Canal de Mocambique reported the journalist's arrest in its April 2, Monday, edition, and other papers started to pick up the story on Tuesday. After learning that all others detained had been released except Manguana, we opted to make discreet inquiries, starting with the prominent local NGO, the League of Human Rights (LDH). The League representative was surprised to learn of the journalist's detention -- LDH does not subscribe to Canal de Mocambique -- and he promptly informed his boss, Alice Mabote, LDH president. She contacted the Mozambique Attorney General and went in person to the police station that afternoon; by late Tuesday, Manguana was let free. Post also contacted the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA), which released a statement condemning the arrest of Manguana.

¶4. (SBU) Comment: It was gratifying to see LDH, Mozambique's human rights watchdog, so responsive. The Attorney General, too, seems to have been genuinely helpful. Gratifying, too, was such prompt reaction on the behalf of an outspoken journalist. Manguana had, just days before, written an "open letter" to Minister Dai in Canal, calling for his resignation. Weeks earlier, Manguana wrote an equally audacious article

calling the Minister of Sports and Youth "a liar." In a country where the independent media is still asserting itself, Manguana's reporting stands out -- and may have contributed to his arrest.

Johnson